

Committee on Resources

Testimony

Statement of
Commissioner Tim Snead
County
On Keeping the Hanford Reach
Wild, Scenic, and Accessible
Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1811
Thursday, October 9, 1997
10:00 a.m.

I would like to thank the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands for holding this hearing on this very important issue to the State of Washington. My name is Tim Snead, County Commissioner of Grant County.

Since becoming a Commissioner in 1993, I have been concerned about the future of the Reach. There is no doubt in my mind that the majority of people in Grant County favor local control rather than federal control. There is bi-partisan agreement on this issue. I am the only Democrat on the Commission and we debated this issue of local versus federal control at our 1994 Grant County Democratic Convention. Everyone there was in favor of local control except one person from the Audubon Society.

In 1990 the State of Washington passed into law the Growth Management Act. This law required certain counties to jointly plan with their cities. Grant County was required to plan under this law in 1991.

In May, 1993 pursuant to the Growth Management Act of Washington State, Grant County adopted a Resource Lands and Critical Areas Development Ordinance. This ordinance protects and regulates activities in the following Critical Areas:

Wetlands, Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Areas, Frequently Flooded Areas, and Geologically Hazardous Areas.

It also provides for the protection of the following designated resource lands:

Agricultural Resource Lands, Mineral Resource Lands, Cultural Resource Areas, and Forest Resource Lands.

If we do not protect these resources adequately, we will be challenged on our decision. We are also in the process of assessing where these critical areas are, if and where there are endangered species we do intend to provide protection. Before the County can allow anything to happen on the 66,000 acres in Grant County we must take public input on what the public wants and at the same time protect these resources.

Another reason the people in Grant County want to be involved in the protection of the reach is the cost. The Hanford Reach has some of the most productive salmon spawning beds on the Columbia River. This has been achieved through the Vernita Bar Agreement. With the current listing of the Steelhead as endangered and the salmon soon to come, our Grant County Public Utility District will have to spend a tremendous amount of money. Grant County is a rural county. It is the 4th largest in the State, 1,715,328 acres, with a population of 67,000 people. Our unemployment rate is above state average, and median income below the state average. National Marine Fisheries is telling the rate payers of Grant County they

will have to pay for 36% to 45% of capital cost for Salmon Habitat Conservation. This is estimated at \$250 million along with lost power generation of \$33 million or more per year. Because of these extraordinary costs to our rate payers in an economically distressed county we are very aware of the importance of protecting the Reach along with the surrounding lands. We were very concerned when National Marine Fishery approved a commercial fishing operation on the Reach about 2 months ago without input from local jurisdictions. You can see why we get so frustrated with federal bureaucrats.

The counties are now providing fire control, search and rescue, weed control, boat patrols to protect cultural resources. The costs of these services are borne by county taxpayers. Bearing in mind that the current in lieu of tax payments are inadequate and subject to congressional appropriations we feel great concern about further erosion of funds. The last fire on the Wildlife Refuge was almost 3 years ago, and was contained to 17,000 acres. Firefighters (largely volunteers), responded from five different Grant County Fire Districts, as well as ones from Adams and Franklin County. Several local crop dusters made numerous water drops, and finally the Commissioners authorized a borate drop just prior to nightfall, in order to secure the lines for the night. When the dust settled, and we assessed the costs, the counties willingly absorbed the costs, as did the State of Washington, but when the Federal Fish and Wildlife Department was asked to pay for the borate drop, the answer was "NO, it wasn't in our budget and we didn't authorize this expenditure." All land that burned was within the Wildlife Refuge currently under the management of Federal Fish and Wildlife, and yet we received no help from them.

Another concern we have is the sloughing of the White Bluff Cliffs. The environmental community wants you to believe that the farmers irrigation water is causing the sloughing of the Cliffs. But that is not true. The real cause is from the federal Bureau of Reclamation water capture system. There are three water discharge areas along the Reach. This water is not used by the farmers and is discharged back to the river. These capture areas form ponds, and the seepage of these ponds are causing the sloughing. The County would like to see the water rerouted away from the river to an area that is safe from sloughing and would be farmable. There is enough water not being utilized to irrigate 30,000 acres. The farmers using this water will pay for the system.

In closing, I want you to remember, there is bi-partisan agreement on joint management of the river and local control of the lands. The State Growth Management Act requires us to protect now and forever our resources.

The people in Grant County have a financial interest in the cost of Salmon Habitat Recovery through the huge rate increases coming.

The counties are already providing services to the area with very little revenue, and Federal In Lieu revenues are never certain.

We have a plan to recapture water away from the White Bluffs and shift it to an area that will not damage the Bluffs or Salmon spawning beds. This is a win/win for everyone.

It is time for governments to step up and form partnerships. Benton, Franklin and Grant Counties, and the State of Washington are willing. I hope the Federal Government will be a willing partner. Doc Hastings bill is just that, a partnership. Norm Dicks bill is not; it sets up an adversarial position between local and federal government.

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